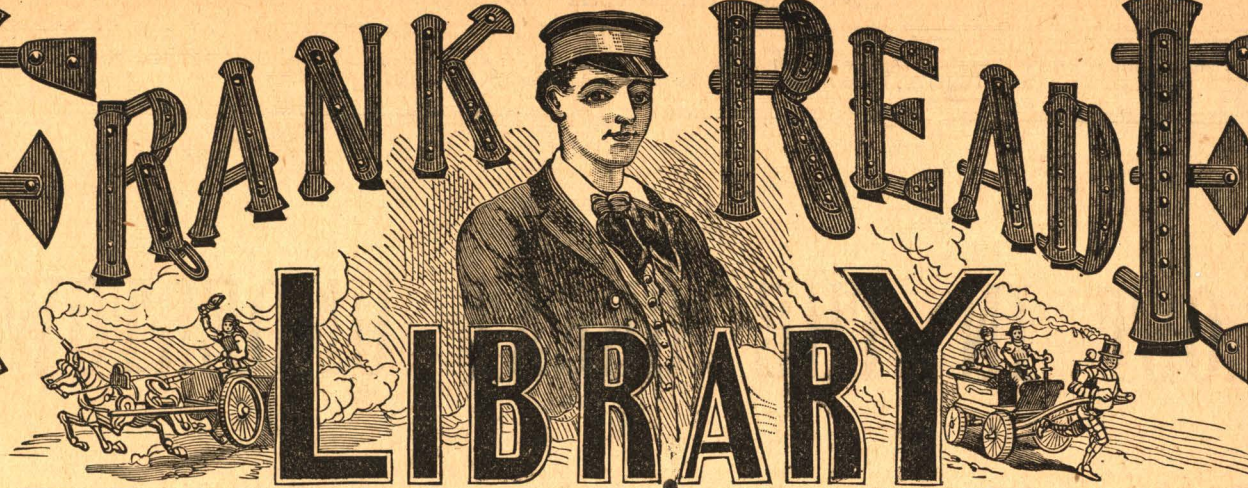


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Lost in the Great Undertow; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Submarine Cruise in the Gulf Stream.

By "NONAME."



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LOST IN THE GREAT UNDERTOW;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr.'s Submarine Cruise in the Gulf Stream.

The Story of a Wonderful Exploit.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Chase of a Comet," "Around the Arctic Circle," etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

PROFESSOR PURINTON'S HOBBY.

Of course the reader is aware that the mighty ocean is not without its current and undertow, perhaps more sluggish but nevertheless more powerful than that of any known river in the world.

An empty bottle dropped at sea may travel in ocean currents from one part of the world to another for twenty years, or perhaps forever. The great salt water of the Earth is far from being a passive body.

Scientists for many years have made a close study of the ocean currents, with the result that most of them are quite well known and mapped out on charts.

But certainly no devotee of geographical pursuits could have been more zealous in the pursuit of this line of study than James Purinton, A. B. A. M., Professor of Sciences at the great American Institute in Washington.

Professor Purinton had traveled the globe over in these currents, studying their phases and variations with every sort of an instrument known to science.

It seemed as if he could possibly have no more to learn.

Yet he said:

"The one aim of my life is to travel over the Gulf Stream current in a submarine boat. I am sure that it is the one current responsible for the Great Undertow."

"The Great Undertow?" asked a friend in surprise. "Does such a thing exist in the ocean?"

"Does it?" exclaimed the professor in surprise. "Certainly it does!"

"What do you mean by the Great Undertow?"

"I mean a tremendously swift and powerful circular current caused by the meeting of a number of powerful currents a thousand fathoms beneath the surface. This makes a deep sea current or undertow which we do not feel on the surface, but which is nevertheless powerful enough to clutch all sinking objects and whirl them on in its embrace for thousands of miles."

"Wonderful! Have you positive evidence that such a thing exists?"

"Why, certainly. Every scientist knows that it is the reason that soundings cannot be taken in many parts of the ocean. The plummet is unable to descend through the undertow."

"It must be a very powerful thing then."

"It is. Indeed, I have no doubt that in its great whirl there are wrecks of ships which have been hustled on through submarine depths for many years. You can now understand why I should like to pay a visit to those lower parts of the sea."

"Indeed, yes. What a strange spectacle it would be. But you speak of a submarine boat. Why do you not charter the new one which has just been built?"

The professor gave a start.

"A new submarine boat?" he gasped. "I have never heard of that. Do you mean it?"

"I do!"

"Then—the question of submarine navigation has been solved?"

"Yes!"

"By whom?"

"Read this, then you will understand all."

Purinton's friend handed him a newspaper, and the professor with varied emotions read as follows:

"The Latest Triumph of our Great American Inventor, Frank Reade, Jr. This time is not an air-ship, or an electric horse, but a submarine boat. In this, Mr. Reade proposes to travel under every ocean on the globe. It is hard to describe the benefits and valuable information to be thus gained.

"The Octopus, which is the name Mr. Reade has given his boat, is a marvelous affair. We have not the necessary details of its construction yet in our hands, but we hope to prevail upon Mr. Reade to show them to us at an early day, when we shall be pleased to render them to the reader. In the meantime we trust that Mr. Reade will find a grand triumph awaiting his deep sea trial of his new invention, which is certainly the most wonderful on the globe."

For a moment after reading this astounding bit of news, the professor was dumfounded. When he recovered himself it was like one coming out of a dream.

"May I retain this paper!" he asked in an abstract way.

"Certainly!"

Then the scientist seemed to lapse into a curious spell of thought. The result was that he rather abruptly and unceremoniously left his friend, nor did he pause until he was alone in his own retired den.

Then for a time he was like an insane person.

For a time he would pore over a lot of charts. Then he would read the newspaper article afresh.

Finally he sat down to a table and wrote feverishly. This is what emanated from his pen:

"MR. FRANK READE, JR.,

"Readestown.

"DEAR SIR:—I see by the Daily News Chronicle to-day, that you are the perfecter of a submarine boat. The announcement if true is to me like the answering of a prayer. For forty years I have made the subject of ocean currents and the Great Undertow a close study. I have lived and prayed for the opportunity to further a discovery and investigation of the Undertow. It seems now as if the chance was mine, provided you will prove amenable to my desires. You are going to take a deep sea trip with your submarine boat. That is the dream of my life. May I go with you? It is a prayer from my heart.

"If you answer me, pray remember that suspense is agony to a man so earnest in an undertaking as I am in this. Delay is trifling with the overwrought brain of one whose life has been one aim for this desired end. I await,

Yours earnestly,

"JAMES PURINTON.

"WASHINGTON, D. C.

Readestown, the home of Frank Reade, Jr., is one of the loveliest little cities in America.

It was founded by Frank Reade, Senior, and the younger Reade had by his genius developed it.

The great machine works upon the lovely river had been built by him. His inventions in all lines had made Frank Reade, Jr., marvelously rich.

Upon this pleasant June day he sat in his office with a number of charts of the sea spread before him.

Upon the opposite side of the desk stood two men of striking appearance.

One was a negro, short and diminutive, with kinky wool and shining rows of ivories.

He was known as Pomp, and was a faithful servant of the young inventor's. He had been in his employ many years.

So also had the other, who was a sturdy Celt with a stock of red hair, a broad mug, and a fund of Irish wit which it was hard to equal.

His name was Barney O'Shea.

Barney and Pomp were much devoted to their young master, who thought as much of them.

They were just now engaged in studying the charts and maps, and Frank, after some evident perplexity, said:

"I don't see what better we can do than to plunge right into the Atlantic and sail straight across to the coast of Portugal."

"Begorra, Mither Frank, we'll see a good lot av the deep say in that way, to be sure," agreed Barney.

"Golly, you're jes' right dar!" averred Pomp; "it would jes' be a good, long trip I done reckon."

"I only wish we had some object in view," declared Frank. "I don't like the idea of sailing around aimlessly."

Barney scratched his head.

"Bejabers, there's small chance to rescue any one drowned at the bottom av the say!" he declared.

"We might go huntin' fo' de sea serpent," declared Pomp.

Before Frank could make any comprehensive answer to these suggestions there came a jingle at the electric bell.

The young inventor reached forth and touched an electric button. This opened the yard gate.

And from the office window a telegraph boy was seen walking across the yard.

He had an envelope in his hand, and entering he placed it on the desk.

"Telegram for Frank Reade, Jr.," he said.

Frank picked up the message, and read it thus:

"Have sent you letter concerning trip through ocean currents. Please answer by wire. Am in suspense. Yours,

"JAMES PURINTON."

Frank was in hourly receipt of such messages from cranks, and was about to throw this down as only another of the same kind when the bell rang again, and this time the mail carrier appeared.

He placed a special delivery letter on the desk, and Frank saw that it was dated at Washington, and bore the heading of the American Institute.

Ordinarily he would have cast it aside like scores of other epistles which he believed were written by scientific cranks.

But some motive impelled him to break the seal and read with thrilling interest the graphic letter of Purinton.

"This man is a reputable scientist," he declared. "He evidently means business. There is logic in his theory. Hurrah! we have an object now, Barney and Pomp."

Eagerly the two servitors drew nearer while Frank read the letter. Both were intensely interested.

"Wha' yo' gwine to answer, Marse Frank?" asked Pomp.

"In the affirmative, of course," declared Frank. "Call that boy back."

The messenger boy had not left the yard. He was called back and Frank at once wrote the following message:

"PROFESSOR PURINTON,"

"Washington, D. C.

"Your plan is admirable. I will keep you in suspense not a moment longer. Come on to Readestown whenever you are ready to start."

"Yours truly,

FRANK READE, JR."

When James Purinton received this message he was quite the happiest man in America.

CHAPTER II.

UNDER THE SEA.

In the river at Readestown one day the submarine boat lay at anchor. An immense crowd was gathered on the banks watching her.

A tug lay near by, and a number of the prominent citizens of the town, by Frank's invitation, were taking a look at the boat.

What could be seen of her above the water line was sufficient to impress the spectators with the fact that she was no ordinary craft.

Aboard the Octopus, which was the name on her stern, Frank was showing his friends over the boat.

As seen by these, the Octopus was in line of hull not unlike a small sloop with considerable beam and a long bow.

Her hull was of thin but hard rolled plates of steel.

Over her deck the steel roof, concave and strongly ribbed, was constructed. In this dome-like structure there was a huge skylight of thickest and toughest glass. Also there were large observation windows fore and aft.

A door amidships opened out upon a platform, protected by a guard rail, which ran all the way around the boat.

Forward was a broad deck, also protected by a rail. Here was the pilot house, with windows of plate glass, and an electric search-light capable of throwing a light like day for a long ways.

Over the stern was a deck with a small cabin in which was an observation window. Two masts were employed to steady the boat.

The interior of the Octopus was a revelation.

As one stepped from the vestibule, with its hermetically constructed door, into the small cabin, he was charmed with its appointments.

They were of the richest description, and far exceed any effort at adequate description.

Beyond the main cabin were the staterooms, then the dining saloon and the cooking galley.

Below stairs were the gun room, the magazine, the engine room, and below that was the great automatic reservoir, which regulated the rising and sinking of the boat.

By means of valves, water admitted to the reservoir caused the Octopus to sink.

To raise the boat it was only necessary to expel this water by means of pneumatic pressure.

The engine room was a marvel, for here were the great dynamos, the electrical engines and the great storage batteries, the invention of Frank Reade, Jr.

But as wonderful as anything was the system for furnishing the boat with fresh air while it was under the surface.

This was done by means of chemical generators which diffused the air by means of valves and pipes to all parts of the boat.

This same generator attracted and destroyed all impure air or gases at the same time.

The mayor and the council of Readestown were quite awed by the inventive genius of their young townsman.

They paid him rare compliments, and finally went reluctantly back to the shore.

The boat was all ready for her Atlantic cruise, and they were only waiting for Prof. Purinton.

But they had not long to wait.

He was on hand that afternoon and with all his effects. He was rowed out to the Octopus immediately.

Frank met him at the rail.

"Am I delaying you?" asked the scientist, as he warmly gripped Frank's hand.

"Not a bit," replied the young inventor, "though I am glad that all is at least ready. We will start at once."

"I am agreeable."

First, however, Frank showed the professor to his state-room. He was truly delighted with this.

He occupied himself for some while in unpacking his effects. When he had concluded his room looked like a small laboratory—so many and varied were the scientific effects.

Then he went on deck.

A band was playing on shore and the people were cheering. Frank gave the word to Barney and Pomp to haul up the anchors.

This was done, and the submarine boat glided down the river.

The voyagers remained on deck until Readestown was out of sight. Then Frank Reade, Jr., turned and clasped the hand of Purinton.

"We are in for it," he said. "We are going to brave the dangers of the deep sea. May fortune be with us, for it is no light undertaking, and we may not come home alive."

"So be it," declared the professor.

Let us now change the scene of our story to the depths of the blue Atlantic.

While we may admit that this is somewhat of a transition, yet we believe it will suffice to say that the submarine boat reached the sea safely and finally struck into the Gulf Stream on the 30th parallel of north latitude due east from St. Augustine.

After getting well into the current Frank let the boat go to the bottom.

A wonderful scene was revealed.

The bed of the sea lay revealed in the glare of the electric light. From the observation windows the voyagers were able to view all with impunity.

There were gorgeous forms of marine life, plants and coral reefs and deep caverns.

Myriads of vari-colored fish swam before the boat. The water occasionally was cleft by the lance-like body of a monster shark.

Professor Purinton was right in his element.

All he could do was to sit in the window and constantly watch for some new and unheard of sight.

Barney and Pomp were kept somewhat busy by the duties of the boat, and Frank as well.

But the darty and the Celt yet found time for a friendly scuffle or a practical joke.

While the best of friends they were fond of playing jokes on each other. It was generally an even thing.

They were careful to indulge in their skylarking when Frank was not around.

The young inventor always disapproved of such work.

The Octopus had not been many hours in the depths when Barney availed himself of an opportunity to play a sharp game on Pomp.

If there was anything in the world the darty was afraid of it was a snake.

He had resided in the everglades a part of his life and had there acquired his fear of the reptiles.

Barney knew this well and took advantage of the fact. An incident enabled him to do so.

In some manner a huge eel got into the reservoir.

Barney saw it swimming about through a bull's-eye window which looked into the big tank.

With much labor the Celt finally succeeded in hooking the monster out.

It was of the variety which can live on land quite as well as in the sea.

Barney dumped it into a basket and hid it in the engine-room. At a favorable moment he sneaked into Pomp's state-room and coiled it up between the sheets.

And there the eel remained until the time came for the darky to retire.

Unsuspectingly Pomp leaped into his bunk. Something terribly cold and slimy coiled about his leg.

That was enough.

Like a maniac in his terror, the darkey kicked off the clothes and leaped out of the bunk. Down upon the floor went the wriggling eel.

Now, Pomp knew little about eels. To him it was a monster moccasin snake, and he had felt the fangs in his leg.

It was really a prick from the eel's fin, but Pomp believed that the snake had struck him.

His screams filled the cabin.

"Golly fo' glory, I'se done got struck by a snake!" he yelled. "Bring dis chile some whisky quick! It am de only fing will sabe dis nigger shure!"

Frank came rushing in, followed by the professor. The coon had grabbed a bottle of bay rum from a shelf, and had swallowed the contents.

"Mercy on us, Pomp! what's the matter with you?" cried Frank.

"Oh, Marse Frank, dis chile am bit by a heap big moccasin. Dere am de critter! Look out!"

Barney was sneaking behind an angle in the corridor without, holding his sides to keep from bursting.

Frank and Professor Purinton both looked in the direction indicated by Pomp, and the latter said:

"Bless my soul, it's an eel!"

"An eel!" declared Frank. "Why, you black jackanapes, it can't hurt you! It's not a snake!"

Pomp ceased groaning, and stared at the writhing mass on the floor. It was an instant metamorphosis.

"Fo' de Lor's sake!" he gasped. "I done fot it was a snake."

"Not a bit of it!" cried Frank; "it's only an eel!"

"How den fo' goodness' sake did it ebber come to get into mah bed?"

Then he and Frank exchanged glances. Like a new light the revelation burst upon Pomp.

"Huh!" he grunted in supreme disgust, "dat nasty I'ishman done fink hissef smaht."

And inwardly he pledged his honor to come square with Barney for this mean trick.

This ended the affair.

The eel was set at liberty in its native element, and Pomp experienced no ill effects from the pint or more of bay rum, for he speedily relieved himself of it.

Barney kept shy for a day or two. But his turn was bound to come. Pomp was scheming.

"I get squar' wif dat I'ishman ef it takes a hundred years! he muttered.

And he meant what he said. But Barney was on the alert.

Day by day the submarine boat ran deeper into the great Gulf Stream, which here ran northward.

It was deemed best to follow its course without deviation.

CHAPTER III.

THE SUNKEN WRECK.

Of course in this part of the Gulf Stream the current was so sluggish as to be hardly perceptible.

But Frank had an instrument in the pilot house window which was a regular gauge or indicator, and recorded the direction and force of the current.

He found that as the submarine boat drifted in the current further toward the mid ocean it grew stronger.

This sustained Professor Purinton's theory of the undertow, which he declared positively was in existence.

Of course Frank as well as Barney and Pomp were curious to see it.

They were not exactly skeptical—just a bit inclined, however, to doubt the professor's theory.

The days did not pass without incident.

The bed of the ocean presented an ever varying panorama.

Sometimes wrecks of sunken vessels were seen. The professor was eager to explore one of these, so at once Frank yielded to his request.

A huge rotting hulk lay just under the verge of a coral reef. It was evidently an old time merchantman.

The submarine boat was brought to a halt near it, and descending, rested on the bottom.

The electric light was turned full upon the hulk.

Not much of its rigging or spars was left. That it had foundered in a storm seemed evident.

To pay a visit to the hulk, however, it was necessary to leave the submarine boat.

How was this to be done?

Frank Reade, Jr., solved the problem. He was the inventor of a diving-suit which required neither life line nor air-pump.

The diver carried upon his back a chemical generator which furnished all the necessary oxygen and kept it in circulation the while.

The helmet also was provided with a battery and a small incandescent light.

All this was very much to the advantage of a diver, for the disadvantage of a cumbersome life line is well known.

Preparations were quickly made for a visit to the sunken wreck.

Frank and the professor donned suits.

Barney and Pomp were to remain aboard the boat, and had their instructions to keep a sharp lookout.

To leave the boat, the divers entered a vestibule with hermetically sealed doors.

Water was admitted to this, and then they opened the outer door and walked out on deck.

It was Purinton's first experience in a diving suit, and the sensation was a novel one and not altogether pleasant.

It required some time for him to get used to the pressure of the water upon the helmet, and he was for a time giddy and faint.

Frank, however, was an adept at deep sea diving.

He made signs to Purinton to follow him, and set out for the hulk. The professor slowly followed.

Frank reached the wreck first and inspected its position as well as he could.

It lay upon a bank of sand which was overgrown with kelp and sea mosses. There was a great seam in its hull showing how it came to founder.

The sand had drifted in sections along the vessel's side, so that one could almost walk into one of the ports. Frank climbed up to one of these and looked into the vessel.

The scene which he beheld was a motley one.

Silt and marine growth had almost entirely filled the vessel's hold. Among this fungus-like substance which covered walls and floors as well as ceiling, there were myriads of curious little sea creatures.

It was neither pleasant nor possible to enter the place, so Frank turned back.

It was possible for him to talk with Purinton by placing their helmets close together.

"I don't think we can enter the vessel," he said.

"Indeed," exclaimed Purinton in a disappointed voice.

"The vessel is quite given over to decay, and is filled with deep sea growth."

"That is too bad!" said Purinton.

"You are disappointed?"

"Yes."

"Then we will make another trial with a more recently foundered vessel. This ship is too far gone."

"Indeed it looks so," agreed the professor. "She must have been here a good many years."

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I am satisfied. What shall we do?"

"We will explore the vicinity a little if you wish, and then return to the boat."

"That will be very agreeable to me."

But before either could turn to carry out their purpose an astounding thing happened.

Frank felt a sudden commotion behind him.

Some terrific blow knocked him down. He was instantly upon his feet. He looked about him for the cause of his mishap.

There was no visible cause for it and the realization was intensified by another mysterious fact.

The professor was gone.

He had vanished as if by magic.

A moment before he had been standing by Frank's side. Now he was missing.

What did it mean?

For a moment Frank was too confused to properly regard the matter. When he recovered, he received an awful thrilling revelation.

In the lower part of the vessel's hull there was a wide seam.

Beyond this the water was in violent commotion. Myriads of small fish were scattering and a great cloud of sea silt came pouring out.

Something was going on inside. But what was it? Frank could associate it with nothing but the professor.

But how had he been transported thither so swiftly? Had he traveled of his own volition?

If so he was evidently having a lively time in the hold of the vessel.

Frank was determined to investigate.

He started for the scene at once. At his girdle he carried a short-handled and keen axe.

This is the best weapon to use under the sea. He gripped it tightly and rushed forward.

Then he saw a glimmer of light in the hold.

It was the lamp on the professor's helmet. Frank hesitated no longer. He sprang through the aperture.

And the scene which there met his eyes was a thrilling one. There was the professor with a long, snake-like fold around his body.

It was the arm or tentacle of a monster sea-devil which had taken up its abode in the wreck.

Frank understood all now.

The octopus had reached out and grasped the professor at the same moment giving him an accidental blow which had knocked him down.

The professor was in mortal peril. The beak like jaws of the monster were near at hand.

But he was nevertheless making a bold bid for his life. He was wielding his axe furiously.

If Frank could have made himself heard he would have shouted:

"Hang on bravely! I am coming to help you."

Forward he sprang and attacked the monster on the other hand. It was a lively struggle which followed.

Two of the monster's tentacles were severed and its beak smashed before it yielded.

Then the two divers released themselves and retreated from the hold of the sunken wreck.

They gripped hands outside with mute joy. Then once more they started for the submarine boat.

Barney and Pomp from the observation window of the boat had partly seen the affair.

"Golly!" gasped the darky, "dat am jes' a berry close call fo' Marse Purinton. I done fo't de debbil hab him."

"Bejabers he'd niver kape him av he got him," declared Barney. "Shure he'd niver be smart enough."

"I done fink yo' am right, honey. Hi dar! See honey, dey am coming back to de boat."

Then both beheld a sight which set their chattering teeth on edge. Frank and the professor had really started to return to the submarine boat.

But before they had covered half the distance there occurred a catastrophe which seemed likely to cost them their lives.

There was a terrific commotion in the water and around the sunken wreck there suddenly darted a half dozen monster fish of the shark species.

The difference was, however, that these fish were not compelled to turn upon their backs before seizing their prey.

They evidently saw in the two divers an excellent chance to whet their ravenous appetites.

Frank was the first to see the danger.

He was quick to act.

He knew well the penalty of being overtaken by these monsters. Yet it was impossible to beat them to the boat.

Any one of them had jaws large enough to bite the divers in two. But Frank was as usual ready and quick of resource.

He made what was, under the circumstances, the best possible move.

This was to throw himself flat upon his face and pull the professor down with him.

The huge fishes, missing their aim, passed over the prostrate men. But it was a close call.

That they would return to the attack Frank knew. His helmet was close to the professor's, and he took advantage of the opportunity to shout:

"They will come back. When they do turn on your back and don't let them pick you up with their jaws. You have your ax?"

"Yes," replied Purinton. "I will do as you say."

The huge fish made a semicircle, and now came back to the attack. They were close to the bottom now.

The two divers were in deadly peril. But all this while Barney and Pomp had not been idle.

CHAPTER IV.

MATTERS OF A VISIONARY SORT.

THE huge fish this time meant to secure their human prey. They darted along the bottom with wide open jaws.

Had either Frank or the professor remained inanimate they would surely have been picked up by the ravenous monsters.

But each was resolved to defend his life to the last. Each gripped his ax stoutly.

As the first fish was making its descent upon him, Frank made a savage blow with his ax.

It struck the monster's jaw, and the keen edge half cut it away. Blood streaked the water.

With a convulsive shoot the big fish was away toward the surface, probably crazy with pain.

The professor had struck at his assailant and literally disemboweled him.

This was good work.

But other fish of the same savage kind were coming in troops, and the danger was now seen to be of no light sort.

Unless something was done at once of an extreme nature the fate of the two divers would be sealed.

Right and left from their prostrate positions they rained blows at the big fishes.

Sometimes they struck them and at other times missed. But all the while the pressure was telling on them.

The professor was black in the face from the strain, and his efforts at defense were becoming weaker.

It was at this juncture that Barney and Pomp proved their sagacity and utility.

"Begorra, naygur!" cried Barney wildly, "thim divils av fish will ate thim up!"

"I done believe yo' am right, honey," agreed Pomp, "but wha' am we gwine to do?"

"Bejabers, we must be afther doing something!"

"A'right, fish! Jes' say wha' it will be,"

Barney sprung into the pilot-house. He pressed the reservoir lever and raised the boat three or four feet.

This was all.

Then he set the propeller in motion, and the Octopus glided forward and directly over the two prostrate men.

There it hung, they being under the keel. Had it sunk they would have been crushed.

But Barney took care that this did not happen.

The effect was to prevent the sharks getting at their victims. They

bumped against the boat with such force as to make it reel, but did not make it budge.

Frank and the professor saw Barney's scheme at once.

In the bottom of the boat was a vestibuled trap, designed for studying any object directly beneath the boat, or for picking up any such object.

This now proved the salvation of the lives of the two divers. Pomp's face appeared at the glass bull's-eye and the trap swung open.

It is needless to say that Frank and the professor lost no time in climbing up into it.

The trap was arranged just the same as the vestibule on the upper deck. The door was closed and then the water quickly pumped out.

Then the two exhausted men, saved from a horrible fate, staggered into the hold; Pomp met them.

"Massy sakes, Marse Frank!" cried the darky with delight. "Neber was so glad in all mah life! Done fo't yo' was done fo', fo' suah!"

"Pomp, you and Barney saved our lives!" cried Frank, effusively. "You are heroes!"

It was a joyful reunion in the cabin. Professor Purinton was intense in his gratitude to Barney and Pomp.

"That was a terrible moment," he declared. "I thought our fate was sealed. But for that one trick of forcing the boat over us, we would have been food for the fishes."

"You are right," agreed Frank. "I never saw such a ravenous horde before. But now let us give them a little attention."

The water about the boat was fairly alive with the big fish. They even made savage attacks upon the boat.

"I'll fix them," muttered Frank.

He went into the engine-room and attached a wire to one of the dynamos. This he connected with a knob in the steel hull of the boat.

Then he cautioned all to keep in the cabin which was insulated ground as he said:

"I am going to charge the hull very heavily with electricity. A shock would be fatal to any of us."

"We will take good care to keep out of the way, then," declared the professor, lightly.

So they did as Frank directed. The circuit was made and Frank turned on the current.

The effect was something thrilling.

In an instant there was a terrific commotion in the water. Every fish whose nose came in contact with the hull of the submarine boat went to the surface belly upward.

In less time than it takes to tell it a full score of the fish had thus been disposed of.

Then Frank put on all speed and ran away from the dangerous locality.

But he and the professor had good reason for self-congratulations for their narrow escape.

Every day now the Octopus drew nearer the locality where Professor Purinton expected to find the great undertow.

But as yet there was no palpable signs of its existence.

That the current were a little swifter and stronger was morally certain.

But it would certainly need to be much swifter to justify any prediction that they were drawing near the undertow.

What, after all, if the professor's calculations should not prove correct?

What if the great undertow was like many another marine wonder but the figment of some romancing seaman's imagination?

It was safe to say that the scientist would be disappointed, but not at all convinced.

He would to the last cling to his pet hobby.

Frank was even half inclined to fancy that the professor might be misled, and once ventured to hint at this.

A cloud passed over Purinton's face and he was silent a moment. Then he smiled confidently and said:

"You have certainly heard of the Great Maelstrom off the coast of Norway?"

"Indeed, yes!" replied Frank.

"Well, that is the Undertow on a small scale and confined wholly to the surface. Now the great Undertow is wholly in the depths and is a hundred times larger and more powerful."

Frank did not argue the point further.

He saw it was of no use.

The professor was dead sure of his point and would certainly cling to it. So the subject was dropped.

And the submarine boat continued to glide on in the Gulf Stream. One day Frank said:

"We are now in the East Branch. If we keep on we may finally descend and cross the Equator near the African coast—"

"No," interrupted the professor. "We shall be in the Undertow before then."

Barney scratched his head and Pomp whistled under his breath.

Frank smiled quietly.

It was plain that skepticism was rapidly growing.

Try as hard as they might they could not conceal this fact from the old professor.

He read their minds like a printed book, and at first it disturbed him not a little.

But as the days went by he lapsed into a dogged and firm confidence. He spent much time making his observations.

His scientific instruments were constantly by him, and his post was always at the great observation window.

"Begorra, Misther Frank," Barney ventured to say once, "it's sorry I'd be fer the purfesser if he shouldn't foind that undertow."

"Indeed, yes," agreed Frank.

"And a fool's errand fer us, sor."

"Oh, never mind that," said Frank lightly. "We might as well be doing this as anything. We are having our submarine cruise just the same."

So it was certain that the disappointment would come harder upon the professor than anybody else.

But one day he astonished all by coming into the cabin with the startling declaration:

"In six hours' time we shall be in the Great Undertow."

For a moment intense silence reigned.

Neither Frank Reade, Jr., nor Barney nor Pomp knew what to say. They could not doubt the scientist's sincerity.

The boat at the moment was gliding along smoothly through a calm sea.

There was not the least appearance of anything like a swift current.

That the undertow should be so near at hand seemed incredible.

Incredulity shone in the eyes of Barney and Pomp.

But Frank was disposed to humor the whim of the scientist, and said:

"Then we had better prepare for rough work."

"Yes," said the professor, earnestly, "for in so powerful a current you will have your hands full to keep out of the way of the floating wrecks and other debris which is hurried along by the undertow."

Frank winced a little at this seemingly strong declaration, but said sternly to Barney and Pomp who were giggling:

"Be off, you rascals, and make everything ship-shape. You hear what the professor says."

Barney turned a hand-spring and Pomp cut a shuffle. Away they went to obey orders.

Then Frank turned to the professor.

"So we shall be in the Undertow very soon," he said, quietly.

"Yes," replied the scientist. "In about six hours, as I reckon it."

"How do you make the reckoning?"

The scientist threw a chart upon the table. He placed a finger upon that point in the middle Atlantic where the big ocean currents diverge.

"There is the starting point of the great Undertow," he declared. "At our present rate of speed we shall be there in just six hours."

CHAPTER V.

IN THE UNDERTOW.

"This is what you base your calculations on," said Frank quietly.

"But it is not all."

"Ah!"

"Come with me, and I think I can demonstrate to your satisfaction that I am right."

"I shall be pleased."

The professor led the way into the observation tower. He pointed to the ocean bed and said:

"Look sharp and you will easily see that the sand and the rocks as well as the general formation of the ocean bed shows an inclination to drift one way."

"Look at that bank of sand. See those scattered boulders. Even the marine plants bend all in one direction."

Frank was surprised to note that this was a fact.

"On my word!" he cried. "You are right, professor."

A light of triumph shone in the old man's eyes. His voice trembled as he went on:

"I knew you would admit that. Now shall I explain it? This is a section in the verge of the undertow. At some distant day the great deep sea maelstrom included this very tract in its course. That accounts for the drifted or driven appearance of the sea bottom."

Frank saw the point.

He became instantly interested. After all there might be more in this hobby of the aged scientist's than he had ever thought of.

He mused a moment and then said:

"And you think we shall in a few hours be in the undertow?"

"I do."

The professor spoke emphatically:

Frank went into the cabin. He at once set Barney and Pomp about making things ship-shape. He had accepted Professor Purinton's theory as a fact.

The professor hung out in the observing tower. Nothing could induce him to leave this.

An hour passed.

A great change had come. The color of the sea had changed to a murky hue.

The boat had a peculiar vibration. It seemed carried forward more by the force of the current than the engines.

Another hour passed.

The vibrations had increased. And now if one placed his ear attentively to the pilot-house window, he could hear plainly a distant peculiar reverberation.

"We are certainly approaching something," Frank mused. "Whether an undertow or a submarine geyser I know not."

The professor was jubilant.

"We will soon be there," he declared. "Keep your weather-eye open. It will be lively."

Three hours now passed. The fourth drifted by without much change.

But the fifth hour brought a material change.

The submarine boat traveled above a vast and current swept sandy plain. Not a sign of marine vegetation was there.

The plain looked as if it had been swept by a new broom. Yet the current was not so strong.

However, a distant sullen roar carried out the professor's declarations in full. It was the peculiar swish and boom of a heavy current.

Every moment now there was adduced fresh evidence that they were nearing the great undertow.

Purinton was in a state of great excitement. Suddenly the boat began to sway and rock.

Frank saw that the current was moving her along with it in spite of the engines.

"We are in the verge of the undertow," cried the professor excitedly. "Do you fear for your boat, Mr. Reade?"

"Not a bit," replied Frank. "Let her run with the current, Barney."

"All roight, sor."

And this was done. Every moment this current grew swifter. The submarine boat was soon traveling like a railroad train.

The bottom seemed like a sand swept surface where nothing could find a resting place, being hustled and jostled on by the insatiable current.

And swifter the Octopus flew on as they now got deeper and deeper into the current.

And the boat was not alone the victim of that resistless surge.

The professor was dancing a jig for very joy in the observation tower.

"Look—look!" he cried. "Didn't I tell you? The Great Undertow carries everything before it!"

The object was a heap of rottentimbers, which had become water-logged and would have rested upon the bottom but for the force of the current.

As it was, they were whirled on to keep up the endless course until decay should finally dissipate them into fragments.

Many and curious were the objects which the undertow held in its clutch.

One was a dead whale, which raced alongside the boat for a good ways. Another was a chicken coop from the deck of some ship.

And thousands of miscellaneous articles were speeding on in the tow.

One object telling its tragic story was a dilapidated and storm riven raft of ship's timbers.

To the stump of a mast was bound a limp human form. After it came a stove ship's boat.

But nothing more of the crew were seen then. Though at the dinner hour, as all were satisfying their hunger, Frank chanced to gaze out of the window and gave a cry of horror.

There, racing at full speed alongside the glass was a stark and stiff human form.

The dead man's glassy eyes were staring full into the boat and caused every one a chill.

"Jericho!" gasped Frank, springing up, "that is too horrible!"

"Some poor victim of a shipwreck," declared the professor.

But no effort was made to reclaim the body. The victim was beyond aid. The Great Undertow was his transitory grave.

To attempt to describe all the scenes witnessed in this terrific deep sea current would be tedious and require volumes.

Shortly after this the boat experienced a gentle shock. Professor Purinton gave a great cry.

"Stealy!" he shouted. "We are alongside and locked in with a drifting Wreck."

A glance out of the port windows told the truth.

The Octopus had run alongside a dismasted vessel which was sufficiently water-logged to remain in the grip of the undertow.

The boat had locked in with the wreck so that it seemed to Frank as if it would be necessary to go out on deck and cut away.

This was not a pleasant contemplation.

It was by no means certain how long a man could keep his feet on the deck.

It would certainly be a very hazardous feat. But it seemed certain that it must be done.

However Barney and Pomp were eager for excitement and willingly took the chance.

"Begorra, Misther Frank. I'm yure mon!" cried the Celt.

"Dis chile am in it too, Marse Frank," declared Pomp.

But Professor Purinton had been studying the vessel. He saw that she was a small steamer, probably employed in some carrying trade. That she had foundered in a gale seemed certain. The scientist became imbued with a daring idea.

This was to go aboard the drifting ship. Once his mind was made up no ordinary obstacle could stop him.

So he interposed as Barney and Pomp volunteered.

"Wait a moment," he said. "Mr. Reade, I want to ask a favor."

"Well?" said Frank.

"I want to ask of you the privilege of going aboard that craft?"

Frank was amazed.

He gazed at Purinton as if he thought him bereft of reason.

"Aboard that ship?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean that?"

"I certainly do."

"But——"
 "What?"
 "Have you considered the risk?"
 "I think I have," replied the professor. "I am willing to assume it."

Frank whistled softly.

"If you really mean it——" he began.

"I do!"

"That settles it. Which one of you will go with the professor?"

Both Barney and Pomp were eager, but Purinton selected Pomp. Then the diving suits were brought out.

They were donned by the two venturesome men, and then they proceeded to leave the cabin.

Passing into the vestibule, they emerged upon the deck.

They were obliged to cling well to the rail to avoid being swept into the depths. But by dint of some effort they kept their places all right.

The next thing, however, was to pass over to the deck of the wreck. This was no easy matter.

However, after several efforts, they finally succeeded.

They disappeared over the rail, and this was the last seen of them by Frank and Barney.

The professor and Pomp crept across the deck of the sunken steamer to her main hatch. Here they were protected by the corner of the hurricane deck-house and the smoke funnel.

They rested here a bit. Purinton placed his helmet close to Pomp's and shouted:

"Are you all right?"

"Yas, sah!" replied the coon.

"All right, let us explore the cabin."

The door leading into the upper cabin was gone, and there was some indication of the storm's damage, but the two explorers passed easily into the cabin.

Here they were more at ease, for there was no powerful current to face. The electric lamps on their helmet made all quite plain in the place.

The interior of the cabin was similar to that of all ocean steamers. The furniture was of the standard pattern.

Much of it was in a wrecked state, of course, and debris was scattered from one end of the ship to the other. There was every indication that the steamer had made a noble battle against the elements before succumbing anyway.

CHAPTER VI.

ABANDONED IN THE UNDERTOW.

POMP was interested in affairs in the dining salon and galley. He appropriated several articles which suited his fancy.

But the professor made his way toward the purser's office.

It occurred to him to try and find the vessel's log if possible and also see if she had any money in her safe.

If in gold, it was doubtless intact. The scientist was at once deeply interested in this matter.

So he pushed on until he reached the door of the purser's room.

He placed his hand on the knob.

It would not yield.

The door was locked.

The professor tried to force it, but in vain. Then he knelt down and probed the key-hole.

The key was on the inside. Like a flash a comprehension of all burst upon him.

The purser had locked himself in his room, and had gone down with the ship. Whether this was intentional or not could not be told.

It was probable, however, that the purser had retired, and when the ship went down had been asleep and had perished thus.

The professor knew that there was no other way but to find out by forcing the door.

So he put his strength to it and tried to force it. Failing in this, he began to batter it with his short-handled ax.

In this way he had soon broken the lock.

Then it was an easy matter to open the door. The sight which met his gaze was a thrilling one.

The purser had indeed perished in his bunk.

It was possible that he had never known the cause of his death. He lay like one in a deep slumber.

Near by was his desk and the ship's safe. Fortunately the door of this was open.

The scientist drew a sheet over the face of the dead man.

Then he went to the desk and turned the leaves of a great book there. It was the purser's log.

The last entry was made the very last night of the purser's stay on earth. It read thus:

"May 10th, 18—. Tuesday, 6 p. m.

"Gale still blowing hard. Barometer stormy. Temperature 44 degrees Fahrenheit. Ship labors heavily. There is some danger that she may open a seam, but Capton Clifton says that she will ride it out. Heaven pray she may.

"AUDREY COMERFORD,
 Purser of the steamer American Flag."

This was the last entry on the pursuer's log. Previous entries showed that the steamer had battled with the storm for many days.

She was a tramp and carried merchandise for the Azores. But the gale blew her many hundred miles out of her course.

It was a tragic matter to reflect upon, and the professor did not care to linger long in the stateroom.

He went to the safe and took a hasty look at its contents.

There were many packages of greenbacks stowed away there, probably representing thousands of dollars.

But the moment they were touched they melted, so that it was a treasure very like fairy's gold.

In one of the small compartments Purinton found about one thousand dollars in gold.

This he took.

Then he left the purser's room and closed the door behind him. Pomp emerged from the galley at the same moment.

The professor made signs that he was ready to return to the Octopus. Pomp acquiesced.

They started for the deck. They emerged from the companionway just in time to behold a horrible truth.

The Octopus was gone.

It was no longer beside the wreck. It was not even in sight.

The awful truth was forced upon the two men. The submarine boat had taken leave of them in a very sudden and unexpected manner. The grappings had broken, but—the question they asked themselves was: why did not the submarine boat again run alongside the wreck?

Why had they been left to their fate?

But Purinton understood well. He knew that it was impossible to control the Octopus in such a sea. It had been compelled to draw away.

But what a terrible realization to the abandoned men.

Abandoned on a wreck at the bottom of the sea! What more awful fate could be conceived?

Of course the chemical generators would continue for months, but that was not the question.

How could they sustain life without eating? It was of course flatly impossible.

A horrible death by starvation it was which stared them in the face. Pomp drew close and shouted:

"Golly, Marse Purinton, we are sho' enuff done fo'!"

"My soul, it seems so!" gasped the distraught scientist. I am afraid we shall never be able to get back to the Octopus. For her to attempt to find us in this terrible undertow would be like looking for a needle in a haystack.

"Golly, I done believe yo' am right."

The situation was certainly an awful one, and the two poor victims went whirling along in the undertow; deserted, abandoned, lost at the bottom of the sea.

Would they find an escape from their dreadful predicament? It seemed out of the question.

Barney and Frank, on the deck of the Octopus, saw the professor and Pomp disappear over the rail of the wrecked steamer.

Then a misgiving struck the young inventor.

"Mercy!" he exclaimed. "Why did I let them go? I should have known better. What if we should break away——"

Before he could finish his sentence that very calamity occurred.

A warning yell came from Barney.

"Look out, Mither Frank! Shure, the other boat is after leaving us!"

This was true beyond all manner of doubt. There had been a slight shock, a quiver, and then the two boats parted.

The American Flag drifted rapidly away, and bid fair to be soon lost to sight.

And, indeed, that very thing did happen. While Frank was bringing the Octopus about to give her chase a dark portion of the swift current hid her from view.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew that the lives of Pomp and Prof. Purinton were depending on him.

He knew that no effort must be spared to find the wreck before it could get too far away into the undertow.

So he pressed on all speed and tried to follow the wreck. But some inexplicable division of the current here baffled him.

It carried the Octopus in one direction and the wreck in another. In less time than it takes to tell it the wreck and its two abandoned victims were lost.

Frank and Barney were wild with horror and despair. Yet they were apparently powerless.

Frank tried every device of which he could think to overtake the wreck. But the submarine boat was powerless to stem the undertow.

It was hurled on at the same frightful speed, while other wrecks now began to appear to confuse the desperate searchers.

However, these were barks and sloops, all sailing vessels, while the American Flag was a steamer.

Lost in the great undertow!

This was the position of Prof. Purinton and Pomp.

Barney exclaimed:

"Be jabers, Mister Frank, it's a sorry day they iver left the Octopus. Shure, I'm sorry that the naygur went wid him. If he wanted to go so foolhardy loike he ought to have gone alone!"

"I believe you are right, Barney!" agreed Frank. "I am sorry I let him go."

"Och hone, an' it's loike brothers we have been for so long," wailed Barney. "Shure he had a black skin but a whoite heart."

"We won't give them up yet," said Frank, resolutely.

But it seemed as if this was a futile boast.

The submarine boat seemed wholly in the grip of the powerful current, which nothing could stem.

But Frank sent her ahead at full speed, and never ceased to keep a keen lookout.

On and on in the great undertow the Octopus ran thus.

But days and nights passed, and no sign of the wreck was seen. It seemed certain that they must give her up.

But Frank Reade, Jr., set his teeth hard, and mentally declared:

"If it takes forever, I will find the wreck. I will never leave the great undertow until I have succeeded."

And the young inventor meant just what he said.

He would surely spend his life in the ocean depths in the effort to find the lost men.

Barney kept constantly in the pilot house, keeping watch incessantly. While he slept Frank took his place.

And thus the quest went on. As the Octopus was now whirled onward through the undertow the current seemed to grow less swift.

At first Frank was at a loss to understand this.

"What does it mean, Barney?" he asked.

"Shure, sor, I'm after thinking we are getting out av it," declared the Celt.

"Out of it?"

"Yis, sor!"

"That's queer!" muttered Frank, "how can that be? Does the undertow finally come to an end? I had an idea it was a circular endless mealstrom."

"Begorra, Mither Frank, its out av it we are going anyway!"

Frank was puzzled.

Every moment the current now grew less swift. It was a matter of but a few hours when the submarine boat was in comparatively smooth water. This was curious enough.

One thing was certain. They had run completely out of the great undertow.

CHAPTER VII.

A BAD COLLISION.

THE Octopus was in comparatively smooth water.

The thunder and vibration of the undertow could be still felt, and after some study it dawned upon Frank all of a sudden that he was a bit stupid.

They were out of the undertow, of course.

But this did not naturally follow that they had reached its termination. They had simply struck into a little side current and ran outside the whirl of waters.

To get back would be simply necessary to change the course of the boat. That was all.

Frank communicated this fact to Barney. The Celt agreed with him.

"Begorra, I think we'd better kape along in the edge a bit, sor," said Barney. "Mebbe the wreck is afther coming out the same."

Frank saw the logic of this at once, and replied:

"I guess you are right, Barney. We will follow out that plan."

"All roight, sor!"

So the submarine boat kept along at a moderate speed just in the verge of the undertow.

Suddenly Barney gave a great yell of terror. A huge black object shot athwart the bow of the boat.

What followed for the next few moments was to Frank and Barney like a blank.

It seemed as if the boat was going all to pieces.

Something heavy and powerful had it in its grasp, and it seemed as if it was being torn to pieces.

Frank and Barney were tossed and hurled about like puppets. They were unable to keep their feet even for a moment.

Objects in the cabin went flying about. The propeller buzzed, the machinery whizzed furiously, the electric lights flashed and burned out, and all was total darkness.

Frank Reade, Jr., at that moment believed firmly that the end had come. He could see nothing ahead but certain death.

Some terrible power had the boat in its grip. It seemed bound to destroy it.

Finally Frank landed against a door frame, and clutching it was able to remain stationary.

Then suddenly the boat was motionless. It was upon the bottom, as it was easy to realize.

"On me wurrud," gasped Barney, as he crawled out of a tangled heap in a corner, "I belave I'm nigh kilt. I niver had sich a shakin' up afore in all me loife. Are we's drowneded, Mither Frank!"

Frank, in spite of the pain of his bruises, replied:

"No, I think not, Barney!"

"Sure, if this is purgatory, it's a mighty dark place. I'd as lief be out av it once fer all."

"Well, have no fears, Barney," replied Frank. "It is the cabin of the Octopus, and we are yet alive. But, heavens, how near death we may be!"

"Phwat's the matther with the loights?"

"The shock must have broken the current. Try and find the switch, Barney. You are near the pilot-house."

"All right, sor!"

The Celt fumbled around and felt his way into the pilot house.

There was an auxiliary battery for that room, and he called it into play.

In a flash the pilot house was lit. Frank crawled in beside Barney.

The light was not powerful enough to see far ahead of the boat, but they could distinguish a dark mass against the bows.

"Shure, I can't make out phwat that is, Mither Frank," declared Barney, "but I'm av the opinion that we struck a big ledge av rock."

"Maybe so," agreed Frank, "but let us see how badly the machinery is injured."

To Frank's surprise the propeller was still going.

The machinery seemed uninjured, but it probably would not remain long in that condition unless it was checked at once.

So he shut off the dynamos. Then he tried the lighting circuit.

This was broken, but it required only a moment to find the broken wire. Frank mended it with a simple twist.

Then he pressed the key and instantly all the lights were ablaze.

The search-light threw its rays ahead, and the astounding cause of all the trouble was seen by Frank and Barney.

"Mither av Moses!" gasped the Celt.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Frank.

There before them was the ponderous body of a huge whale.

It was the monster which had shot in front of the boat, and the Octopus had driven its ram into the monster's body.

It was easy to see that all the terrific commotion had been caused by the death struggles of the cetacean.

It had been a close call for the submarine boat.

But for the fact that the ram had struck a vital part, it would surely have been destroyed by the furious antics of the whale.

But the blow proving fatal had very shortly put an end to the monster's struggles.

And there it lay at the bottom of the sea, with the ram of the Octopus so firmly imbedded in its carcass that the boat could not move.

Here was a situation.

Was there power enough in the machinery to draw the ram out? Frank made the trial.

The dynamos buzzed. All available speed was put on.

But in vain.

The boat's ram was firmly wedged. It would not yield. Frank exchanged glances with Barney.

The Celt scratched his head in very perplexity.

"Be Mither Maguire's goat!" he exclaimed ruefully, "it's dead sthuck we are, Mither Frank!"

"So it seems!" agreed Frank. "How will we get clear, Barney?"

"Shure sor, it's yesilf is the foine invintor."

"Yes!" admitted Frank, "but there are some things past invention. It looks as if the bow of the boat was lodged in the whale's vertebrae."

"I'll agree wid yez, sor, though divil a bit do I know phwat that is!"

"It's his back bone," replied Frank. "There is certainly one thing we can do."

"Phwat's that, sor?"

"We can cut our way out of the whale's lubber. Perhaps it is the best way, unless—"

"Well, sor?"

"We try a dynamite cartridge."

Barney ducked and scraped.

"Shure, I'm afther thinkin' that's the aisiest way," he said.

"Yes," agreed Frank, "and perhaps we will try it. But first let us see how badly the boat is strained."

"Yis, sor!"

Frank now went below and made a critical examination of the hull and all the parts of the boat.

He saw that a few of the standards were a trifle started, and there was a dent in the plating.

But no seam had parted, nor was there a leak, so he felt encouraged. So far as could be seen, the boat would stand a long cruise yet. There was no immediate cause for alarm. But the escape had been a narrow one.

Frank went back to the pilot-house and once more studied the position of the whale.

This satisfied him that it would be safe to try dislodging the boat by means of dynamite.

So he went into the cabin and brought out a cartridge.

Barney was eager to place it under the whale so he put on his diving-suit.

Then he left the cabin and made his way forward along the bowsprit.

The cartridge was thrust deep in the sand under the whale's body. A wire connected it with a battery on board.

Barney returned to the cabin.

Then Frank pressed the key. In an instant there was a terrific shock.

Water literally boiled around the boat. The dynamite did its work well.

But the shock had thrown the valve of the reservoir over. In a moment the pneumatic pressure emptied the chamber and the boat shot upward.

Up it went like a rocket.

Up and up through countless fathoms to the surface. It burst up into the light of day like a cork.

The boundless ocean lay upon all sides. With dismay Frank sought to open the reservoir valve.

It would not work.

For the first time during the voyage the submarine boat refused to

sink. It was certain that its mechanism was deranged by the shock of the explosion.

"Be Paddy's poipel!" exclaimed Barney, "it's a foine scrape we're in now, Misther Frank!"

Frank admitted this.

It was truly a dreadful reflection that they were unable to return to the bottom and to the rescue of the two men lost in the undertow.

For a moment Frank was appalled.

What if the damage to the boat was such that they could not return to the depths again?

It would be a certainty then that Pomp and the professor's fate was forever sealed.

It was an awful thought.

Frank nigh held his breath with the horror of the thing. But he would not yield to such a fear.

He was about to go below and investigate when Barney, who was in the pilot house, cried:

"Shure, sor, there's a ship bearing down upon us, an' she looks loike to run over us!"

Frank sprung to the observation tower.

He saw at once that Barney's declaration was true. A rakish looking craft was bearing directly down for the submarine boat.

What was more, it was a suspicious looking craft.

She was of Spanish build, and her rail was thronged with dark featured and desperate looking men.

Frank regarded the advancing ship for some moments with suspicion. The impulse was upon him to run away from the strange vessel.

But at that moment a puff of smoke came from her rail and there was a distant boom. A solid shot went skipping over the waves just before the Octopus' bow. This was rather a startling development.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PIRATE.

THE Spanish vessel was armed. What did it mean? Was she a government ship?

This suspicion was the next moment dispelled in rather a startling manner. Suddenly and without warning the newcomer ran a flag up to her masthead.

It was a black flag.

Frank gave a gasp of amazement.

"A black flag," he muttered, "and in these modern times. What does it mean?"

But the fact was not to be disputed. The vessel was a pirate, as was seen beyond all doubt.

Of course it would have been madness to have disregarded the summons to lay to.

The pirate could, with one well-directed shot, send the submarine boat to the bottom forever.

It would be much safer and better to temporize with the villains and perhaps depend upon some strategy to outwit them.

So he allowed the Octopus to lay to while the Spanish pirate drew nearer. It seemed to Frank as if he had been transported back to the days of Captain Kidd and the buccaneers.

For certainly here was a genuine old time pirate ship.

The crew which crowded the rail were all armed with cutlasses and carbines, and were about as tough a set of men as ever trod a ship's planks.

In the shrouds was a powerful-framed, black-featured fellow who shouted stentoriously:

"Aho! what craft is that?"

"The submarine boat Octopus," replied Frank. "What ship is that?"

"The Donna Isabella, free lance. I am Captain Murillo, her commander. You are our prize!"

"You are a pirate?"

"Yes!"

"Well, how much money do you want?" shouted Frank. "You want a fair ransom!"

"Ransom!" retorted the pirate captain, "we want you and your ship, and that is what we have got."

Frank saw that it was of no use to try and treat with the villains. Oh, how he longed for a gun. He regretted now that he had not fitted the boat with one.

The pirate vessel had hove to and a boat was being lowered.

"Be jabers!" muttered Barney, darkly, seizing a rifle, "if yez only say the worrud, Misther Frank, divil a bit nearer will they come."

"No!" cried Frank, "that will not do. They have the drop on us. It would be folly and would only result disastrously for us."

"I've a moind to thry it fer luck," muttered Barney.

But he did not.

The pirates' boat, manned by a number of stout ruffians, drew rapidly nearer the Octopus.

In a few moments it was alongside.

In the bow was Captain Murillo himself. He leaped onto the deck of the Octopus and gazed about him with wonderment.

"Your craft is a small one, senor," he declared. "Where are your crew?"

"We are all," replied Frank.

"Only two of you?" exclaimed the astonished Spaniard. "Diablo! how do you come in this part of the world?"

"We are here as you see," replied Frank. "We came here in this boat."

"A more curious craft I never saw; I am interested, senor. What sort of a boat is it?"

"It is a submarine boat," replied Frank.

"Pardon, senor."

"It travels under water," replied Frank in explanation. The pirate captain looked stupidly incredulous.

"Under water!" he muttered. "Ah, that is impossible!"

"It is true," replied Frank. "And you would not have caught us had not our machinery been a bit out of order. We would now be at the bottom of the sea."

"I have never heard of a boat that can travel under water," declared Murillo. "Are you in the employ of your government?"

"No," and Frank proceeded to tell him the story of the cruise and of the accident to the Octopus.

The Spanish captain listened like one in a daze.

He could hardly believe it even then. But Frank offered to take him into the cabin and show him all the workings of the craft.

The pirate captain complied, and Frank showed him through the cabins, and finally into the engine room.

This was just what he wanted.

He requested Murillo to take hold of a wire which was connected with the dynamos.

Murillo complied.

The next moment he was sorry. He could not let go.

"Carambo! Saints defend!" he howled. "Release me! I am tortured! Curses on you, treacherous American!"

But Frank had no idea of releasing the villain. Instead, he went to the hatchway, keeping out of sight, and played a clever ruse.

Imitating Murillo's voice, he shouted in Spanish:

"Murillo stays with the Yankee captain to dinner. Go back to the Isabella, trim sail, stand off a mile, and wait for signal!"

The pirate lieutenant got the order. He never dreamed but that it came from his chief.

Murillo, held by the live wire, was in the engine-room cursing and raving, but he could not be heard, for a heavy door was between.

The Isabella's lieutenant proceeded to carry out the orders exactly. Back to the pirate ship he was rowed. Then the Isabella stood away from the Octopus a mile or two.

It was Frank's victory.

He had the pirate captain a prisoner in his power. Moreover, he had the start of the Isabella and could easily beat her to the horizon.

Barney was elated.

"Begorra, an' didn't we foot thim!" he cried, excitedly. "Shure, an' it's a regular picnic we 'ave had!"

Meanwhile, Murillo was raving and threatening. Frank went up to him coolly, and said:

"Don't forget that you are in my power, Murillo, and that I could kill you if I chose. So be a little more civil and less blasphemous."

"Begorra!" cried Barney, a little later. "I reckon there's not many but would have hung the vilyun afore this. Misther Frank, yez are too merciful to thim!"

"I don't want the scamp's life," said Frank, "but he must not try any of his black games on me!"

The Octopus could sail ahead fast enough even if it could not sink. So Frank went into the pilot house and put on all speed.

Away shot the Octopus leaving the pirate vessel behind. And there it continued to remain.

While the submarine boat was rapidly beyond pursuit.

What the conclusion of the pirates were was never known. Whether they eventually tumbled to the situation it was not easy to say.

But the Donna Isabella was soon left far out of sight. Then night came on and the certainty of the escape of the Octopus was assured.

Words can hardly describe the intense rage and discomfiture of the pirate Captain Murillo.

He raved and cursed but all in vain.

Frank and Barney securely bound him and placed him in one of the state-rooms, locking the door.

They knew that he was a desperate fellow, and they could afford to take no chances with him.

Darkness had settled down, but this made no difference aboard the Octopus.

The electric lights made all plain as day, and the two ment went to work at once.

Frank began to overhaul the reservoir machinery. For a time he was oppressed with a terrible fear.

This was that the machinery was so badly out of gear that they would be obliged to return to Readstown before being able to repair it.

But after hours of research he emerged with a hopeful smile—Barney saw it and cried:

"Begorra, Misther Frank, yez are going to be able to foix it?"

"Yes," replied the young inventor, "I think I shall—we will very soon be able to start back to the undertow."

Barney turned a flip-flap.

"Hooray!" he cried. "Shure that's a cure for the blues. We'll foind thim now fer a certainty."

"We'll try it!" modified Frank.

A few hours later Frank had so far repaired the boat that she was easily able to descend.

He lost no time, but set his course back to the spot where he had just gained the surface after the collision with the giant whale.

For hours the submarine boat plowed the waves. Then in the darkness Barney saw a distant light.

"Misther Frank!" he cried.

"Well?" shouted Frank.

"Shure I belave that's the loight av that pirate ship!"

Frank sprang to the search-light and sent its rays flashing across the water.

It was the Donna Isabella.

There was the distant boom of a cannon shot. Then Frank pressed the reservoir valve.

He was not especially afraid of being hit by the shot, but this was near the spot where they had left the undertow.

Down sank the Octopus.

That was the last seen of the Isabella. As the Octopus descended very soon the force of the undertow was felt.

The boat began to speed faster than the action of her engines. Soon the flash light showed the bottom and also the body of the great current.

As Frank was desirous of getting right into the undertow he made no effort to stay the course of the Octopus.

It was once more flying with railroad speed through the great current.

Heaps of debris and drifting hulks went spinning past. It was a repetition of all that they had seen.

But where in all this chaos was the American Flag and its two passengers! Would they ever be found?

Frank was not hopeful.

He realized full well what an undertaking it was. Indeed it was almost like searching for a needle in a haystack.

Yet the young inventor did not yield. He was willing to devote a life-time to the quest.

CHAPTER IX.

FOUND AT LAST!

ALL this while, it might be truthfully said, that the pirate captain Murillo was raving below decks like a caged lion.

His temper was something most frightful to behold. He was more like a beast than a human being.

"Bejabers, I'm thinkin' it's crazy he is," muttered Barney. "Shure, it's a strait jacket he ought to have!"

But Frank only smiled grimly.

"He will get tired of that," he declared. "Give him time."

A constant outlook was kept for the wreck.

Either Barney or Frank was constantly in the pilot house; but yet no sign of it appeared.

And in all those hundreds of miles of drift it did indeed seem incredible that they would find the wreck in a life time.

Two days the submarine boat kept on its course.

There was constant danger of a collision with some other drifting body, or of being capsized by the opposing forces of the current.

But nothing of the kind happened, very fortunately.

As Frank had predicted, Murillo came to his senses.

The villain found that he gained nothing whatever by his furious actions, so he subsided and became sullen and moody.

Frank kept closer watch of him now, for he knew that this was the most dangerous phase.

The wretch was evidently plotting to the best of his ability to escape. This did not seem easy.

Thus a week drifted by.

Food and drink was given the prisoner regularly. Frank intended to deliver him up to the law at the first port after the rescue of the professor and Pomp.

Of course Murillo knew that this was the purpose of his captors, and it did not add to his peace of mind.

But on the eighth day of the submarine search fortune came to favor them with a joyful discovery.

Frank was in the pilot house when he sighted the wreck of the American Flag dead ahead.

What was more he saw two forms just in the shadow of the poop deck. That they were Pomp and the professor he made no doubt.

"Hurrah!" he shouted with such a ring of joy in his voice, that Barney came tumbling in from the cabin.

"Phwat's the mather?" asked the Celt, excitedly.

Frank pointed out of the pilot house window.

"Look!" he said.

One look was enough for Barney.

He let out a perfect whoop of joy.

"Whurroo! Be Denny Martin's goat! It's thim—it's thim! Be jabbers I'm glad it's thim! Whurroo!"

At that moment also the professor and Pomp saw the submarine boat.

To attempt to describe their sensations would be impossible. They had been victims of an awful despair.

They had however clung to the one wild hope that the submarine boat would appear. As it happened their prayers were answered.

They clung to the rail and made excited gestures.

But Frank was drawing the Octopus as near to the wreck as possible. In a few moments later it was alongside.

Pomp and the professor reached over and gripped the rail of the Octopus.

When it broke away from the wreck they went with it. The rescue was complete.

They were saved.

The two men for so long lost in the Undertow were found. It was truly a joyful moment.

In a few moments more the rescued men were in the vestibule. Then they entered the cabin.

They flung off their helmets and fairly embraced their rescuers. A more joyful reunion could not be imagined.

A mutual interchange of experiences followed.

The rescued men were astonished when told of the experience with the pirate ship and of the prisoner below decks.

"Well, that beats me!" exclaimed the professor, "I thought the day of the buccaneers had gone by?"

"So did I," declared Frank, "but this was a dyed in the wool pirate. It was no easy matter to cage him."

"What will you do with him?"

"Take him to the nearest port and deliver him up to the authorities."

"Good."

"One question."

"Well?"

"Are you ready to return home now," asked Frank, "or shall we see more of the undertow?"

"But little more," declared the professor. "If you are willing, though, I would like to proceed far enough to learn whether it is a maelstrom or one continuous current which finally expends its force."

"I have some curiosity to know that myself," said Frank. "By all means then let us keep on."

So the cruise was continued.

But for this decision the incidents of our story might have come to a sudden termination right here.

All this while the submarine boat had been speeding on. The wreck was left far behind.

The voyagers were all gathered in the main cabin, discussing matters, when a thrilling incident happened.

Suddenly a crashing sound was heard in the hold. There were also loud curses and mad cries.

Frank Reade, Jr., leaped for the stairway.

"The villain has broken out!" he cried. "Look out for yourselves!"

"Golly, I done flink we better catch him!" cried Pomp, as he followed Frank.

Barney was next, and thus all ran excitedly down the stairway.

Arrived at the foot of the stairs, a glance told the truth.

The door of the stateroom in which the prisoner was confined had been dashed from its hinges.

The room itself was empty.

The pirate captain had in some way broken his bonds, and with an iron post, wrenched from the bunk, had battered the door open.

It was a startling and really serious state of affairs.

Murillo was not in sight. It was evident that he had fled to some other part of the boat.

Of course there was no other move but to follow him.

This was done.

The voyagers sped through the hold looking in every corner. There was another stairway than the one by which they had descended.

It was likely that the villain had ascended by this. So Frank led the way up.

Up into the cabin they went. Then a mocking laugh was heard and the clang of a closing door.

A moment more and all beheld what was really a thrilling state of affairs.

The pilot house door was closed and locked. The pirate captain had rushed in and closed it behind him.

It was of strongest steel and not easily forced. What was more the villain had secured a rifle and held it at the transom.

"Back you accursed dogs!" he cried in Spanish. "I will have the life of the first man who advances nearer!"

Of course this brought all to a halt. Not one of the party was so foolhardy as to throw away his life.

"Great Caesar!" exclaimed the professor, "the wretch has got the best of us. He has captured our citadel."

This was true.

The pilot house of course held the electric key board and all the machinery for operating the boat.

It was not likely that Murillo understood these, but this only made the matter worse.

Barney had lashed the wheel to join in the search for Murillo. It would have been better had he remained in the pilot house.

For it did not seem that there was anything to prevent the Octopus from colliding with some drifting wreck. Of course such a catastrophe would mean ruin and death.

So it may be understood that all in the party were aghast at the situation.

Professor Purinton had really spoken the truth. The villain Murillo did hold the citadel.

As to what use he would make of it remained to be seen. He apparently intended to hold it.

Frank was for a moment appalled.

The boat was flying at terrific speed through the current. An idea occurred to him, and he ventured to say:

"Senor Murillo!" he spoke in Spanish. "I would speak with you!"

A shower of curses was the reply.

"Your life depends."

More curses.

"The safety of all of us and the boat depends. You are in the

pilot house. You do not understand the mechanism of the boat. She will certainly collide and drown us all. Listen to reason!"

"What have I to do with it?" returned the pirate captain. "There is no other course for me."

"Yes, there is!"

"What?"

"We will stand aside and let you seek any other part of the boat. We will call it a truce."

The villain laughed scornfully.

"Think you Murillo is a fool?" he cried. "I am not to be so easily entrapped!"

"It is not a trap."

"I do not ask your word."

"Listen to reason. Some one must guide the boat or we shall be wrecked."

"Och, hone! phwat a fool I was fer lavin' the wheel!" wailed Barney.

The situation began to dawn upon the pirate captain. But yet he was not satisfied.

He plainly distrusted the Americans. He feared to come out.

"Yet you are a prisoner where you are!" declared Frank. "Why be so obdurate, Murillo?"

But the controversy came to an end then and there, and Murillo the obstinate was brought to a proper realization of Frank's meaning.

Pomp chanced to glance out of the observation window. A wild cry of horror escaped him.

"Glory, Marse Frank, we'se gwine fo' suah to run into a big rock. I don't see no way to dodge it!"

It was a moment of horror. The next instant there was a terrific crash.

CHAPTER X.

ON THE REEF.

EVERY ONE was prostrated with the terrific force of the shock.

The Americans went tumbling about the cabin. But Murillo fared much worse.

He was hurled with such force against the keyboard that his head struck a cornice, and he was for a moment rendered insensible.

Frank Reade, Jr., was the first to recover himself.

A glance was enough.

The submarine boat had run bow on into a cleft in a jagged reef. The rushing waters made her vibrate like a reed in a gale of wind.

But she was fixed immovably in the rocky cleft. Not even the force of the waters could dislocate her.

"Massy Lordy!" gasped Pomp, as he scrambled to his feet, "we mus' hab sprung a leak dat time. We'se all gwine to kingdom come!"

"No, I think not," said Frank, steadily, "we are aground, but I don't believe we are stove!"

"Begorra, there's no wather yet," cried Barney.

This was good news.

But on the other hand, what a desperate outlook. The submarine boat was wedged in a reef at the bottom of the sea.

Perhaps she could never be floated again. Perhaps if an attempt were successfully made to get her off the reef, she might expose a seam, fill and sink.

They would all be drowned like rats in a trap.

It was a horrible reflection.

Frank passed a hand across his brow and tried to collect his scattered senses.

At this juncture Barney had gone up to the glass window of the pilot house and looked in.

He saw Murillo lying senseless on the floor.

"Begorra, Misther Frank!" he cried, "here's our chance. Shure the spalpeen is done fer!"

Frank saw the situation at a glance. Also he was not slow to grasp the opportunity.

Quick as a flash he cried:

"Open the window, Barney! Lively before he comes to! Bind him hand and foot!"

"Yez bet I will!"

Barney pressed a spring, which caused the pilot house window to fly open. Then he sprang in.

Pomp passed him some rope. It was but a moment's work to bind the author of their troubles.

Murillo had just begun to come to. He cursed roundly as he realized that he was again in limbo.

But this did not help him or the situation. He glared sullenly at Frank and said:

"Now you can see, you fool, to what a strait you have brought us. But for your folly we would not be where we are now."

"We will die together then," gritted the Spaniard.

"That is poor consolation for you," said Frank. "You have run the boat onto a rock, and probably sacrificed all our lives. What I ought to do is to take your worthless life for it!"

Murillo would not reply.

He lapsed into a sullen indifference and dogged silence. But the professor had already begun to study the position of the boat.

"I'm afraid she'll never float again, Frank!" he said.

"Perhaps not!" admitted the young inventor.

Frank went below first to examine the hull.

He discovered now what an advantage the long bow of the Octo-

pus was. It had enabled her to slide far up on the rock, without breaking into the main compartments of the boat.

That the bow was badly smashed there was no doubt.

But this would not necessarily imply a fatal mishap to the boat. She might float all right yet.

He crawled far up into the shell of the bow.

He made sure that there was no puncture of the shell. It was badly jammed but that was all.

Then he returned to the cabin.

There was a hopeful light in his eyes which cheered all.

"I think we shall float again all right," he said.

"Indeed," cried the professor. "How will we get off this rock?"

"I'll show you."

Then Frank called for a diving suit. It was brought.

He put it on.

Then he went out on deck. It was hard for one to keep his feet against the swift current, but he succeeded.

He crept along the bow of the boat until he reached the reef. Here the force of the current was broken.

It did not take him long to size up the position of the boat and the chances for getting her off the ledge.

He saw that there was no possible scheme of leverage that would do it.

To dislodge the boat by some sudden shock was the only feasible plan.

This could only be done with an explosion. Dynamite judiciously used might do it.

So Frank went slowly back into the cabin. As he removed his helmet all crowded about him eagerly.

"Well, Frank!" cried the professor, eagerly. "What is the chance?"

"I think it is good!" replied the young inventor, laconically.

"You do?"

"Yes!"

This was received joyfully.

"How will you effect it?"

"By means of dynamite!"

"Is there not a great risk?"

"There is some!"

Barney at once in obedience to Frank's order brought a cartridge from the magazine.

Frank took it and a coil of wire. Once more he left the cabin.

Once again he crept along the bow of the submarine boat. Then he made an extended examination of the reef.

This resulted in the discovery of a deep orifice far beneath the bow of the boat.

In this Frank placed the cartridge. The position was such that he believed the shock would throw the bow of the boat upward and out of its tight position.

The wire was attached to the cartridge and Frank returned to the cabin unwinding it as he went.

Once in the cabin it was but a moment's work to connect it with a battery. Then all was made ready for the explosion.

When it came there was a tremendous upheaval of the reef. For a moment it seemed as if the Octopus would be destroyed.

It rocked and swayed violently. At the same moment Frank reversed the engines.

The very thing he had hoped for happened. The boat responded to its screw and shot back rapidly from the reef.

It was dislodged.

They were freed from another most deadly peril. Words can hardly describe the situation.

So elated were all that they sent up a great cheer.

Murillo below decks heard it and gnashed his teeth furiously. But this did no harm.

The submarine boat was once more afloat. So far as utility went she was as well off as ever. But her lines of beauty were somewhat marred as the shape of her bow attested.

However, the submarine voyagers were too keenly overjoyed with the escape from their predicament to mind such a little thing as this.

Once more the Octopus sped on her submarine course.

But this time it is safe to say that the pilot-house was not deserted, and a good watch was also kept on the troublesome prisoner.

Prof. Parinton continued his scientific investigations in the undertow. The boat continued to run on in the current which seemed to have no end.

But Frank judged that they were describing a huge circuit, and all the while drawing nearer a central point.

Parinton himself was strongly inclined to this belief, though his favorite theory was the ultimate slackening and elimination of the undertow in a union with slower currents.

"If it were not so," he declared, "there would be a tremendous upheaval on the surface which would have attracted attention of mariners long ago. Am I not right?"

"It would seem so!" agreed Frank. "Yet it might exist in some unexplored part of the sea!"

"I doubt if there is any part of this ocean which has not been cleft by the keel of a vessel."

"There is another way to explain the termination of the undertow."

"What?"

"Some subterranean passage which may carry it to the center of the earth or at least deep enough to expend its force."

The Professor gave a start.

"That is a logical reasoning," he exclaimed. "It is well worth entertaining. We will look into it."

Day by day now the current grew swifter and apparently shorter. It certainly looked as if some definite termination might be looked for. In the hold Murillo still moped in his captivity.

His presence on board was repugnant to all. But it was a case of sheer necessity.

There was no possible way of getting rid of him that seemed at all practicable.

To throw him overboard might perhaps be a much deserved fate and well rid the earth of a monster.

But none of the party cared to be so inhuman as to take the life wantonly even of such a villain.

Meanwhile Murillo's appetite was good and he did not become any less of a charge in the hands of his captors.

To the contrary his cunning brain was continually at work devising some plan for turning the tables on them.

As a result he soon was able to hit upon a scheme which might result disastrously for all on board.

Had the villain succeeded in his game, it would have been the end of all, and the deep sea would have held the tragic event forever an inviolable secret.

Murillo was a dangerous wretch and it would have been better for the submarine voyagers had they never set eyes upon him.

CHAPTER XI.

MURILLO BECOMES FRACTIOUS.

MURILLO had in some way contrived to secrete a small knife in his stateroom.

With this he had sawed away at one of the bars which held the door until he had nearly severed it.

The Octopus was flying at her usual rate of speed through the undercurrent when night came, and all prepared to turn in for much needed sleep.

It was generally customary for Barney and Pomp to remain at the wheel. They alternated positions, one serving the first part of the night, and the other the last.

Pomp had served his watch, and the chronometer marked the hour of two, when he pressed the electric alarm which called Barney.

The Celt came tumbling out quickly enough.

"Are yez there, naygur?" he cried, cheerily.

"Don' yo' see dat I am, sah?" retorted Pomp.

"Whurroo! How do yez expect any wan to see yez afther dark?"

This made Pomp mad.

He bristled up at once.

"Does yo' mean dat fo' an insult, yo' no 'count I'ish?" he asked.

"Begorra it's only the truth," asseverated Barney.

"Yo' look out fo' yo'self. I don' allow nobody to insult me dat way."

"Begorra, I'm not afraid."

And Barney leered insolently at the darky.

This was more than Pomp could stand. He shook his woolly head and made a dash at his tormentor.

Barney acted none too soon.

The darky was lightning-like.

But he was not quick enough in this instance. The Celt moved aside just in the nick of time.

The result was that Pomp came full tilt in collision with the door-jamb. It would have brained an ordinary man with ease.

It did really stagger the darky a little. But he drew back recovering himself quickly.

Then he let out a roar like a mad bull. But Barney had acted in the meanwhile.

Nearby was a shelf upon which was piled a heap of sail cloth. Barney yanked some of this down and spread it out over the darky's face and shoulders.

For a moment it confused Pomp and gave Barney the desired opportunity of getting at close quarters.

Then followed a struggle which baffles description.

Barney grabbed Pomp exactly around the middle. They went waltzing out into the cabin.

They upset chairs and the table, and tipped things over generally until Barney had got Pomp all tangled up in the sail.

Then he went scampering away to the pilot house and locked the door behind him.

The fun was ended.

Pomp could not get at him. He was obliged to be content with standing outside the door and making hideous grimaces at his tormentor.

"I'll hab it eben wif yo' to-morrow, yo' I'ishman!" he cried.

"Yez will if yez have luck," said Barney, imperturbably.

Pomp looked as if he would have liked to smash the glass and get at Barney.

But he did not.

Instead he did what was the best and most sensible thing. He quietly went off to bed and to sleep.

When he was sure the coast was clear, Barney unlocked the door and came out into the cabin.

He quickly set things at rights so that Frank Rende, Jr., would suspect nothing when he should come down in the morning.

Then he went back to the wheel.

The submarine boat was making lively time through the water. Barney saw some dangerous object ahead and was trying to avoid it.

In doing so he became unaware of the fact that a dark panther-like form was sneaking across the cabin.

It was Murillo.

The villain had once more made a desperate break for liberty. This time he seemed likely to be more successful than before.

His form was bent double, great cords were standing out in his neck, and his eyes glittered like diamonds.

He was a murderous object at that moment.

That he meant to attack Barney was certain, and the Celt seemed all unaware of the purpose.

But a kind fairy warned Barney just in time.

Over the wheel and against the roof of the pilot house was a small mirror.

In it one could see all in his rear quite plainly.

Barney had been intensely looking out of the window. Some impulse now prompted him to glance up into the mirror above him.

The sight which there met his gaze might have driven the blood from his veins.

He saw that fierce, hideous face and crouching form. He saw the knife in the would-be murderer's grasp.

For a moment he was spellbound.

It was like the horrible fascination which holds one immovable when threatened by a poisonous serpent.

What should he do?

His hands relaxed their grip on the spokes of the wheel. His eyes were glued upon the mirror.

He saw the assassin creeping cat-like upon him.

Merciful Heaven! Must he be struck down and murdered without resistance? Now the murderer was balancing for his leap.

A yell like that of a maniac burst from Barney's lips. As the murderer leaped, he did the same.

Clear over the wheel he went. This saved his life. It was between him and his foe.

And Murillo, a bit disconcerted by this unexpected move, paused. It was Barney's opportunity.

"Whurro!" he yelled, grasping a wooden cudgel. "Have at yez fer a skulkin' omadhaun! Bad cess to yez, an' I'll foight yez till the death!"

"Jesu, that is hard luck," muttered the Spaniard, in fast English. "See, senor, you must surrender. You are my prisoner. Yield or I will kill you!"

"Divil a bit," replied Barney, stoutly, "if yez want to foight why do it fair an' I'm yer bantam. Come on wid yez!"

Barney would have pressed the electric gong which would have alarmed the whole boat.

But it was out of his reach. The next moment the opportunity was not his.

With his lips parted in a hideous smile, showing his teeth with pearly whiteness, the Spaniard glowered at Barney.

The Irishman stood this for a moment and then cried:

"Oh, be done wid yez crazy lukin' at me that way! If yez don't I'll hit yez in the head!"

"Diablo!" muttered the villain, and then leaped over the binocle. But Barney was not there.

The Celt dodged and made a terrific blow at his assailant. It had a good effect.

It staggered the villain a moment, and he with difficulty dodged the next blow.

But as Barney made this whack at his assailant he missed his footing and half fell.

In a moment the Spaniard was upon him like a panther.

But Barney gripped his wrist just in time to avoid the thrust of the deadly knife.

"Whurroo! Yez didn't do it, yez murtherin' spalpeen!" cried the Celt. "Here's bad cess to yez!"

With which he managed to dash the Spaniard's knife from his grasp.

Then the struggle became hand to hand. It was hard to say which had the best of it.

Barney was much more muscular but less supple than the Spaniard. This made it almost an even thing. Round and round the pilot house they went.

Panting and puffing and cursing the Spaniard tried to down his diminutive antagonist.

In the straggle they reeled against the keyboard. The reservoir lever was struck and thrown open.

The next moment the submarine boat shot upward.

Up it went like a rocket.

Up and up and suddenly emerged upon the surface like a cork. Darkness was over the sea.

The noise and scramble in the pilot house had not been heard by the sleepers somewhat singularly.

But the shock which sent the boat to the surface brought them out of their bunks instantly.

"Mercy on us! what has happened?" cried the professor.

Frank Reade, Jr., leaped into his trousers. Then he rushed out into the cabin. A glance was enough.

He saw the two struggling forms in the pilot house.

He recognized Murillo and Barney, and cried:

"Help, friends! The Spaniard has got loose again!"

"Golly!" screamed Pomp, "he am killin' de Irishman. Lem me git mah hands on him."

And into the pilot house sprang the darky. He was upon the Spaniard like a panther.

Beneath this attack the villain was obliged to succumb.

He was borne down and securely bound. It was an exciting moment.

Then Barney gave his account of the affair. It could in no wise be construed as his fault.

There was cause for mutual congratulations, in which all indulged. Then Murillo was addressed by Frank.

"You inhuman hound!" he declared. "You meant to take this man's life!"

"I did," admitted the wretch, "and if I had succeeded I would have killed all of you!"

It could now be easily seen what a narrow escape it had been for the voyagers.

It caused them all a shiver.

"Take him back down-stairs!" commanded Frank. "If we ever reach a port I will turn him over to the law."

"You will never do that, senor," gritted Murillo.

"Why not?" asked Frank.

"You shall see," was all the reply the villain would make.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH IS THE END.

THE light of day was faintly showing in the east. There was no more sleep for the voyagers that night.

So Frank did not send the boat back into the depths, but opening the cabin door all went out on deck.

It seemed good to get a whiff of nature's ozone. The voyagers had all grown a trifle pale with their deep sea seclusion.

"What shall we do?" asked Frank of the professor, "have you had enough of the Undertow?"

The scientist was thoughtful a moment.

"We have not solved its ending," he said. "We do not know where its termination is!"

"That is true!"

"I wish we were able to."

"I think we are," declared Frank, "if you say the word, back we will go to the depths!"

"No," said the professor, with sudden decision. "I have had enough. I don't care if I never see the Undertow again. I say let us go home!"

Barney gave a cheer and Pomp danced a double shuffle.

"Dat am jes' wha' I say!" cried the darky, "home am de bery bes' place aftah all."

"So it shall be then!" cried Frank. "Let the course be northward, Barney."

The Celt obeyed.

The spirits of all now arose. They were homeward bound, and it was a joyful reflection.

Every mile made by the boat now was taking them so much nearer home.

Daylight was close at hand.

Frank had not taken his bearings since beginning the cruise. This he now proceeded to do.

When the sun was at high noon he made the reckoning and declared:

"We are on the thirtieth parallel of north latitude, and directly in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean!"

"And if we proceed due east," said the professor, "where would it bring us?"

"To St. Augustine on the Florida coast."

"That would hardly be where we want to strike."

"No; I am going to proceed northward for ten degrees, and then sail due west. That will bring us to New York City."

"Good!"

And this course was held as Frank declared. For several days the submarine boat ran well.

Then a startling thing happened. The first intimation of anything wrong was noted in the peculiar motion of the boat.

It seemed to vibrate and wobble strangely and to lose its speed. Frank was mystified.

"You don't suppose she is going to give out, do you?" asked the professor.

"I hardly know," replied Frank. "I shall try and find out."

"What if she should?"

"We would be in a bad box."

There was no denying this fact.

Frank at once went below and began to examine the machinery. It required but a short while for him to reach a decision.

When he came up on deck, he had a serious expression of countenance. The professor noted this.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of it, Frank?" he asked.

Frank swept the horizon.

"We must hail the first vessel we can," he said.

"Why?"

"The Octopus's days are numbered. The delicate machinery is all out of gear and the structure of the hull is weakening. She is apt to go to the bottom any time."

This appalling declaration held all speechless for awhile.

"Golly!" muttered Pomp, "dat would be bery bad indeed. I am a long way to swim ashore."

"Be jabbers yez are roight, an' the walkin' is not good," commented Barney.

"This is a serious matter," said Frank, sternly, and the jokers subsided.

But what was to be done?

Frank could see but one plan and that was to keep a lookout for a sail. It was evident that it was going to be necessary to abandon the boat before many days.

In some way the news reached Murillo. It had a curious effect upon him.

He began to whine and whimper and beg for his life.

"Don't send me to the bottom with her, senors!" he cried. "I beg of you spare my life!"

"Dhry up, yez coward," cried Barney contemptuously, "if yez did go down, it wud be no more than yez richly deserve!"

"Dat am right," cried Pomp, "hanging am none too good fo' such as him."

Every day fresh evidence of the giving out of the Octopus was adduced.

Her machinery ran erratically and she made laborious progress through the water.

And what was very odd was the fact that no sail appeared on the horizon within hailing distance.

This seemed strange, for all parts of the Atlantic are generally filled with sailing craft.

It seemed as if fate had decreed against the Octopus and her plucky little crew.

To add to the seriousness of the situation, the horizon began to darken and signs of a storm appeared.

That it was likely to be a hard one was certain.

The sea began to roll in huge billows. This was fatal to the hopes of the Octopus.

It was plain that she could never hope to outride the storm, to send her to the bottom and wait for the storm to pass over was impossible, for the reservoir gear was broken.

It was a hard outlook.

The voyagers were stumped.

What was to be done?

The small boats aboard the Octopus were of no service. Frank in vain signaled for a sail.

Then he said in sheer desperation:

"There is only one hope for us."

"What is that?" asked Purinton.

"A raft!"

All exchanged glances.

"Would it live through such a storm?" asked the professor.

"It could not sink. Certainly the submarine boat cannot live. All will depend upon whether we can cling to the raft or not."

There certainly was no alternative.

Work was begun at once.

They worked like beavers.

In a few hours they were able to launch the framework of the raft. Heavy timbers as could be taken from the Octopus were used.

These were spiked and lashed together. Then a bulwark was erected to keep off as much as possible the waves.

A jury mast and sail was rigged to keep her steady. Then provisions in kegs were taken and lashed to the raft.

Before nightfall it was all ready to be launched, and this was none too soon either.

The storm was close at hand and the sea running heavy.

Indeed, the voyagers had difficulty in getting aboard. In the excitement they quite forgot Murillo.

Barney suddenly exclaimed:

"Shure, Misther Frank, will yez let the pirate drown?"

"Murillo!" exclaimed Frank. "He must be taken off!"

This was not a pleasant thing to consider. The thought of having the villain on the raft with them was by no means a pleasant one.

But there seemed no other course unless the villain was left to drown.

But Frank went below stairs and said:

"Murillo, we are going to leave the boat. You may go with us upon one condition."

"Jesu pity, senor! Do not leave me here to perish!"

"I will not if you will agree to what I say!"

"Anything, senor!"

"We want to know whether we can trust you or not. We are going aboard a raft. You will be given the use of your hands and feet with which to cling to the raft."

"Si Senor!"

"But at the first sign of evil intent or treachery we will throw you overboard!"

"I swear it, senor!"

"Then come with me."

Murillo followed Frank peaceably enough from the Octopus to the raft. He sat down in one corner silently.

Then the moorings were cut. The raft drifted away from the boat, and with sad eyes the voyagers watched the Octopus go adrift.

The seas carried them further and further apart. Soon darkness shut down over the sea.

The submarine boat was never seen again.

That she found her fate at the bottom of the sea was certain. Perhaps it was a fitting burial place.

As for the raft and its human freight, it drifted on for hours until the storm descended upon it.

Lifted and hurled upon the crests of the angry billows the voyagers never knew how it lived through the fearful tempest.

But it did and with the coming of another day the storm passed away.

For a week the raft drifted on at the mercy of wind and tide. Still no sail.

All this while Murillo had been quiet. He made no effort to affiliate with his captors.

Instead he crouched in one corner of the raft watching them furtively all the while.

Finally his actions became so marked and strange that Frank fell to watching him.

It was well that he did so.

One day the villain began to clutch fiercely at his throat and mutter. His bloodshot eyes rolled and his lips prattled.

Then he leaped up with a terrific yell. In that moment Frank saw the awful danger.

He was a 'maniac.

Brooding over his fate had driven him stark mad. That he was now a dangerous foe was certain.

Just in time Frank sent out a cry of alarm.

Barney and Pomp grabbed billets of wood. The pirate captain brandished an ax and rushed toward them.

A terrible struggle followed.

That struggle with the madman on the raft the voyagers never forgot. It exceeded the powers of the imagination.

How they held him at bay they never knew. But they succeeded in doing so, and the wretch terminated his career in a fitting manner.

Suddenly in a frenzy he ceased raining blows at his antagonists and making a side leap gained the bulwark of the raft.

There he cowered a moment and then with a horrible yell vanished in the waters.

It was the last seen of Murillo. The end was a fitting one.

It can safely be said that not one of the voyagers regretted his disappearance. With it there came a change of fortune.

Not an hour later Barney sprang up with a loud cry:

"A sail!"

This was true.

What was more it was bearing down upon them. As it drew nearer their hearts were gladdened.

For they saw that it was an American bound steamer. They were soon safely aboard.

Two days later they were off Sandy Hook. The cruise of the Octopus had reached its end.

But little more need be said in the termination of our story.

Suffice it to say that Frank Reade, Jr., Barney and Pomp went at once back to Readestown.

Of course the young inventor felt sorry over the loss of the Octopus. But it did not deter him from going at once to work upon a new invention.

But the experiences in the Great Undertow remained fresh in the minds of the voyagers for many a day.

Professor Purinton became the lion of all the scientific associations, and wrote on exhaustive treatise upon the Great Ocean Undertow.

And this, dear reader, brings us to the close of the tale.

[THE END.]

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